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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002317

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BU](#) [IR](#) [GR](#) [NATO](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: BULGARIAN AMB DISCUSSES MILITARY, TRAINING  
CONTRIBUTIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M. Satterfield for Reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Bulgarian Ambassador Valeri Ratchev told A/DCM Speckhard June 29 that his visit to Iraq would help him to refute statements by Iraqi exiles in Bulgaria about how dangerous Iraq service was. Bulgarian forces were positive about their conditions in Iraq, Ratchev noted, and he hopes to get Bulgarian Deputy PM/Foreign Minister Kalfin to visit Iraq in late October. Ratchev added that Bulgaria and Greece will provide 30 Iraqi officers with military training. In addition, Bulgaria plans to train 30 police officers and to do more military training next year. Ratchev claimed that Iraq owes Bulgaria \$2 billion (most of it state debt, although "tens of millions" are commercial) but that Bulgaria will wait until next year to raise this issue. END SUMMARY.

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BULGARIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE  
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12. (SBU) Bulgarian Ambassador Valeri Ratchev met separately on June 29 with A/DCM and PolMilCouns, but he raised the same points in both meetings. On Bulgaria's military presence in Iraq, Ratchev said that he had visited the Bulgarian contingent at Camp Ashraf so that he could knowledgeably counter statements of Iraqi exiles in Bulgaria about how dangerous Iraq service was. In reality, Ratchev stated, Bulgarian forces were positive about their conditions and the officers made no requests. Most Bulgarians did not know the camp was located in an isolated desert area of Diyala province rather than the more dangerous environs of the provincial capital, Baqubah. Moreover, Ratchev noted, they only were guarding those Mujehddin-e Khalq (MEK) members who were being processed for repatriation. On MG Gardner's recommendation, Ratchev said that he intends to send Bulgarian journalists to Camp Ashraf to see conditions for themselves in order to win more public attention for boosting Bulgarian engagement with Iraqis. Bulgaria's one-year commitment ran out in March 2007; after a new UNSCR, Ratchev explained, Bulgaria could consider "enhancing" its mission.

13. (C) Ratchev said that he hopes to get Bulgarian Deputy PM/Foreign Minister Kalfin to visit Iraq in late October, after the next Bulgarian unit rotates in. This would be a good time, Ratchev predicted, because by then the Iraq Compact and the Erbil Reconstruction Conference would be underway.

14. (C) Ratchev said that the Iranians are offering to help more with those former MEK members applying for repatriation from Kut. In Ratchev's view, this gives the Iranians a common interest with the Bulgarians. Also, he noted, those MEK who are interned have a new camp and better facilities.

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TRAINING PROGRAMS TO BE LAUNCHED  
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15. (C) On political-military ties, Ratchev reported that Bulgaria is about to launch a Bulgarian-Greek military training program to begin August 12 at the Bulgarian Land Forces Academy. Aimed at 30 junior and mid-level Iraqi officers, the program would train the trainers in tactical combat skills (which Ratchev noted was called "peace support"). The Greek Government's Center for Peace Support Operations would provide transport and seven lecturers, Ratchev explained. Ratchev said that, in order to prepare a program for next year, he had been in contact with the NATO Training Mission in Baghdad to get information on Iraq's training needs and priorities. Bulgaria also hopes to start a Bulgaria-only basic police training program for 30 police officers and is awaiting names from the GOI.

16. (C) On economics, Ratchev said that, in the past, Bulgaria had been involved in major infrastructure programs in Iraq such as airports and medical facilities. One could not revitalize those past relations, he noted, which had been based on political or ideological ties. Ratchev hoped, however, that friendly relations from Bulgaria's current engagement could form the basis for future commercial links. Ratchev pointed out that Iraq owes Bulgaria \$2 billion, most of it state debt, although "tens of millions" are commercial. Bulgaria would wait until next year to raise this issue, Ratchev said, since Sofia now is focused on its EU application.

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LOOKING FOR AN INTERIM EMBASSY

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17. (SBU) Bulgaria is looking for a new interim property, Ratchev reported, since the Bulgarian embassy in Baghdad had been seriously damaged. Ratchev said that they had found a property in the International Zone where they could move within two months. He asked for U.S. support with the International Zone Property Committee. Khalilzad